DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 214 375 FL 012 823

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TITLE The Place of "Zertifikat Deutsch als Fremdsprache" in the German Curriculum. A Report of a Survey.
PUB DATE Dec 81
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Modern Language Association of America (97th, New York, NY, December 27-30, 1981).
LANGUAGE English; German

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Second Language Programs; Foreign Countries; *German; Higher Education; Language Proficiency; *Language Tests; *Second Language Instruction; Standardized Tests; Surveys
IDENTIFIERS Germany; *Goethe Institute (West Germany)

ABSTRACT

The "Zertifikat Deutsch als Fremdsprache," an examination developed by the Adult Education Centers in West Germany and the Goethe Institute to measure a student's proficiency in German as a foreign language, consists of two main parts, group testing and individual testing. The group testing section covers listening and reading comprehension, structural grammar and vocabulary, and written expression. The individual section covers communication in an everyday situation and a guided conversation. This survey covered almost all colleges and universities using the examination and sought information on: the number of students who had taken the test within the previous three years, the textbooks used in language courses, the bearing of the examination on students' decisions to continue in and/or major in German, and ways in which the test could be improved. Analysis of the responses revealed that: (1) the test is useful; (2) it serves as a more accurate measure of students' abilities than course grades; (3) some guidance is needed as to the appropriate time in the course for students to take the examination; (4) results should be on students' transcripts; (5) students should not be charged the $10.00 fee; and (6) the Goethe House and Institutes should train more test administrators. (AMH)

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The Place of

Zertifikat Deutsch als Fremdsprache

in the German Curriculum

A Report Of A Survey

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The Place of Zertifikat Deutsch als Fremdsprache in the German Curriculum:

A Report Of A Survey

I. Background Information

The Zertifikat Deutsch als Fremdsprache is a proficiency examination which was developed by the Adult Education Centers of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Goethe-Institute in Munich. Since 1972, the Zertifikat has been awarded to over 70,000 students of German throughout the world; in 1977 approximately 4,500 candidates took this test at the various Goethe-Institutes in Germany, and 6,000 candidates at the Goethe-Houses and Goethe-Institutes abroad. It is assumed that presently more candidates are taking this test outside Germany.

The general goal of the Zertifikat, as stated in the second edition of the publication Das Zertifikat Deutsch als Fremdsprache, is to show that the test candidate "den Grad an Fertigkeit im mündlichen und schriftlichen Gebrauch der Umgangssprache erreicht hat, der es ihm ermöglicht, sich bei einem Auslandsaufenthalt in allen wichtigen Situationen sprachlich zu behaupten. Er soll in der Lage sein, ein in natürlichem Sprechtempo geführtes Gespräch über Themen des täglichen Lebens zu verstehen und sich daran zu beteiligen. Er soll ferner einfachere Sachverhalte im Rahmen des vorgegebenen Sprachmaterials mündlich und schriftlich so formulieren können, daß die Verständigung nicht beeinträchtigt wird."[1]

The examination consists of two main parts: group testing (90 points), and individual testing (30 points). Group testing covers Listening Comprehension (30 points), Reading Comprehension (30 points), Structural Grammar and Vocabulary (15 points), and Written Expression (15 points). Individual testing consists of communication in an everyday situation (10 points) and a guided conversation (16 points), with four points given for pronunciation.

The total number of points the candidates can obtain is 120. Candidates are given sehr gut if they achieve between 108 and 120 points, a gut if they score between 96 and 107 points, a befriedigend if they fall between 84 and 95 points, and ausreichend if they earn between 72 and 83 points. An important principle of the entire test is that "inhaltliche Verständlichkeit und sprachliche Angemessenheit vor der Richtigkeit in der Grammatik [stehen]."[2] The cost for administering the test is $10.00, and the test can be taken again for improving the score.

The certificate-examination is accepted by an increasing number of educational institutions in the Federal Republic of Germany as proof of language competence:

> Nach einer vom Goethe-Institut durchgeführten Umfrage gilt das Zertifikat an einer Reihe von Fachhochschulen, einigen Hochschulen und Studienkollegs in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland als Äquivalent für eine sprachliche Zulassungsprüfung. Desgleichen erkennen Behörden und arbeitsvermittelnde Stellen das Zertifikat zunehmend als Qualifikationsnachweis an.[3]

II. Rationale for Instituting the 'Zertifikat Deutsch als Fremdsprache' in the German Curriculum

The main reason for instituting the Zertifikat Deutsch in the German curriculum is to measure a student's performance objectively. It is rather meaningless to say that a student took, for instance, GER 101-102, because the number of class-contact hours varies from institution to institution. In addition, some institutions require supervised or unsupervised lab-attendance, supplement the classroom work with computer-aided instruction, have language houses or clubs with structured activities and/or offer

programs abroad. Unless one is familiar with the language programs across the country, one has no real basis on which to estimate the proficiency of a student who took a given German language course.

My personal experience as coordinator of the Undergraduate German Language Program during the summer at Middlebury College bears out this fact. Students come to Middlebury from a wide range of institutions. With the exception of true beginners, all students are interviewed and they have to take the Placement Test used by the German Department at Middlebury College. In addition, those wishing to enroll in the second year program have to take the MLA Cooperative Foreign Language Test in German, and potential third- and fourth-year students are required to take the MLA Foreign Language Proficiency Test in German. There are usually great differences in the performance of the students, and it sometimes happens that expectations are shattered when some students are asked to take courses at a level lower than they had hoped. The certificate examination could serve as a standard measure of a student's performance, not only for institutions and future employers but also for the students themselves.

III. Results of a Survey Sent the German Departments Offering the Certificate Examination

In order to determine how the Zertifikat Deutsch currently fits into the German curriculum, I surveyed almost all colleges and institutions offering the certificate examination, asking specifically for information in the following areas:

A. How many students took the certificate examination during the last three years, and is it possible to speak of a trend?

B. What textbooks have been used in the language courses?

C. Do students continue with their study of German after they have taken the test, and does the number of German majors as well as the number of students taking German increase as a result of the test?

D. How could the test be improved?

Of the eighty questionnaires mailed out (see list of institutions offering the examination),[4] thirty-two, or forty percent, were returned.

A. Number of Students Taking the Certificate Examination During the Last Three Years

A few institutions had offered the test for the first time; for example, the University of Florida at Gainesville (43 students), Indiana University (20), SUNY at Binghamton (8), Ohio Northern University (3), the University of the South (5), Tufts University (6), Vanderbilt University (11), the University of Vermont (24), West Virginia University (2), and Wright State University (7).

Several respondents felt that the newly instituted examination fee of $10.00 will deter students from taking the exam. For instance, George Avery from Swarthmore College comments as follows:

> Rund zehn Studenten haben vor zwei Jahren die Zertifikatsprüfung in einem benachbarten College abgelegt . . . im vergangenen Jahr haben sich keine Studenten dafür gemeldet, wohl weil der Test nicht hier am College gegeben wird . . . und zweitens wegen der Gebühr.

Bernd Kratz from the University of Kentucky agrees that the fee is a potential deterrent to taking the test:

> Geld! Die erste Prüfung war gebührenfrei gewesen, die zweite kostete was. Die Gebühr ist zwar nicht fürchterlich hoch (im Vergleich zum GRE, CLEP, und dgl.), aber immerhin.

An increase in the number of students taking the exam is anticipated by Ferdinand Piedmont from Indiana University who writes: "Die Frage

nach dem nächsten Termin ist lebhaft, wir erwarten mehr Bewerber als letztes Mal." Ronald Dunbar from West Virginia University notes "an upward trend from area colleges; representatives from other institutions seem genuinely excited about the exam." The same positive results are reported by Milton Grimes from Murray State University: "Yes," he writes, "there is definitely a trend at our university for upper level students of German to take the exam," and John Grandin from the University of Rhode Island expects more students to take this test in the coming year than last year.

A noteworthy response came from Professor Sigrid Weinmann at Michigan Technological University:

> Im April haben 19 meiner Studenten im 3. Jahr die Prüfung bestanden . . . Es waren hauptsächlich Ingenieure. Für uns war diese erste Prüfung wichtig, denn die Fremdsprachen genießen bei einigen Ingenieuren der Fakultät und Administration kein großes Ansehen. Erst in den letzten zwei Jahren habe ich einen etwas positiveren Trend gemerkt, d.h., nachdem Stimmen in der Industrie laut wurden, die nach Ingenieuren mit Sprachkenntnissen verlangten. Immerhin zeigte sich der Dekan der Ingenieurabteilung sehr erfreut darüber, daß die Studenten trotz aller Hindernisse erfolgreich Fremdsprachen studieren . . . Erfreulich für mich war die Tatsache, daß 12 von den 19 Studenten weiterhin Deutsch belegen, um sich auf die Mittelstufen-prüfung vorzubereiten.

B. Textbooks Used in Language Courses

It is not necessary to use a special text in preparation for the certificate-examination. According to Ronald Dunbar, "The choice of texts must be almost inconsequential concerning success on the ZD: of our students (20 or so) who took the test, most used Deutsch Aktuell (not particularly a good preparation for the ZD), and yet only one student failed to pass the

exam, and he was trying it after only three semesters. In a way, it could be that the standards for passing are too low." The general consensus, however, seems to be that some texts are suited better than others because of the test's emphasis on communicative competence. Richard Leister from the University of Alabama suggests Sevin/Sevin's Wie geht's as a possible text," denn das Buch gebraucht im großen und ganzen denselben Alltagswortschatz und dieselben Alltagssituationen wie in der Zertifikatsprüfung." Another text recommended by Anni Whissen from Wright State University is Bonnel and Sedwick's Conversation in German: Points of Departure because "it teaches students everyday vocabulary that they do not have during their first and second years." Most of the replies show that, in addition to such literary texts, as Der Weg zum Lesen, Der Besuch der alten Dame, Schön ist die Jugend, Aus unserer Zeit, Deutsche Literatur von Heute, non-literary material is used in intermediate and third-year level courses. Most common are: Im Spiegel der Presse; Kritisch Betrachtet; Texte von Heute; Wie sag ich's auf Deutsch?; Active German Idioms: German/English-English/German; To Each His Star -- Für Jeden Seinen Stern (Science Fiction, zweisprachig, dtv). Some institutions use material from Inter Nationes, such as Sprechsituationen aus dem Alltag, as well as old exams from the Goethe-Institutes and the Zertifikat-Buch. Personally I can recommend two EMC-Products: Gefährliche Wege and Geheime Mission. Both are dramas of international espionage recorded on tapes and cassettes, and come with a textbook and Teacher's Guide. They can be easily assigned as additional work in the language lab, with discussion conducted in the classroom. Both cassette sets were made available to the intermediate students in the Middlebury Summer Program, and all of them found the material useful and enjoyable.

C. Do Students Continue with Their Study of German After They Have Taken the Test and Does the Number of German Majors, As Well As the Number of Students Taking German, Increase as a Result of the Test?

Most of the respondents indicate that the exam does not attract additional students while it may influence test-takers in their decision to continue with German. Typical answers include:

> The ZD-candidates have continued their German studies with us, although the number of majors and students of German has not increased appreciably.
>
> (Charles Helmetag, Villanova University)

> Students taking the exam do usually continue their German studies.
>
> (Milton Grimes, Murray State University)

> Wenn unsere ZD-Kandidaten ihr Deutschstudium bei uns weiter fortsetzen, dann ist es nicht wegen des Zertifikats, sondern weil sie sich schon sowieso für Deutsch interessieren.
>
> (Sylvia Burkhart, Eastern Kentucky University)

> Die Zahl der Deutschstudenten im allgemeinen und der 'majors' ist innerhalb der letzten zwei Jahre gestiegen. Daß die ZD-Prüfung dazu beigetragen hat, wird man wohl nicht sagen können.
>
> (June McCash, Middle Tennessee State University)

An exception is Sigrid Weinmann's experience, who writes:

> Seitdem wir das Zertifikat anpreisen, ist die Zahl der Studenten wieder angestiegen; im Herbst um etwa vierzig. Spanish und Französisch, die nichts Ebenbürtiges bieten, haben Studenten eingebüßt.

D. How Could the Test Be Improved?

Most people stated that the test is well designed and should be kept the way it is. Typical answers included:

> Der Test ist ausgezeichnet . . . Er ist am besten geeignet für die mündlichen Aspekte des Deutschlernens . . . die in amerikanischen Lehrbüchern zu sehr vernachlässigt werden.
>
> (Irmgard Immel, Morehouse College)

> Verbesserungsvorschläge habe ich z.Zt. noch nicht. Da der Test von den meisten unserer Prüflinge als ziemlich leicht empfunden wurde, werden wir ihn im nächsten Jahr auf einer niedigeren Stufe anbieten, d.h. für Studenten, die das zweite Jahr ihres Deutschstudiums gerade abschließen. Dort wird er wahrscheinlich auch noch mehr "Werbewirkung" tun.
>
> (Ferdinand Piedmont)

Among those suggesting improvement is Richard Leister:

> Ich würde das Verhältnis von Strukturen im Teil Wortschatz und Leseverständnis stärker betonen. Man sollte ebenfalls die einzelnen Mehrfachwahl-Aufgaben und die Statements im Hörverständnisteil auf Richtigkeit und Angemessenheit überprüfen. In dem Teil 'Sprechfertigkeit' waren einzelne Themen viel schwerer als andere. Ich würde meinen, daß sie alle gleich schwer oder leicht sein sollen.

Several respondents criticized the grading for the oral achievement which has the options 0; 0.5; 1.5; and 2. Frank Hirschbach from the University of Minnesota feels that there should be a middle grade for mediocre answers. George Koenig from SUNY at Oswego recommends that "man Situationen vermeiden [sollte] , die dem Amerikaner vom kulturellen Standpunkt her fremd sind, wie z.B. 'Einwohnermeldeamt' und sonstiges."

Ronald Dunbar has two reservations about this test:

> Sometimes the Lesestücke are problematic -- we tried one on native speakers, who found the questions very tricky at times. Answers seemed to be hidden in the test, making a correct choice less a matter of general comprehension than

> of attention to details of tricky wording. [And] I really feel, since a number of our students with only two years of training (three days a week) were able to pass the exam, that perhaps the grading standards (not the test itself!) were a little too easy at the bottom end.

IV. Recommendations

I have four recommendations concerning the administration of the certificate exam. First, the German Cultural Centers should formulate some guidance about the appropriate time to offer this test to students. Some institutions already offer it after the second year, others after the third or fourth. Those departments that postpone the test till after the third year apparently feel that they will lose the students after they have taken the test; so they schedule it as late as possible. One should keep in mind that the Goethe Institutes in Germany offer this exam after 280 hours of instruction. This would roughly correspond to six semesters in this country, based on three class-contact hours per week, amounting to 275 hours. Institutions with a greater number of classroom-contact hours could offer this test earlier. Last summer this test was given to students enrolled in the Undergraduate Summer Program at Middlebury College. The program for all students consisted of 140 hours. Of the nine second-year students taking the test, one passed the exam with 'sehr gut', six with 'gut', and two with 'befriedigend'. On the third year level, ten students passed the test with 'sehr gut', eight with 'gut' and one with 'befriedigend'. If one assumes three classroom-contact hours per week for the first year, then the Middlebury summer students at the end of the second year had 230 hours, and at the end of the third year 320. It seems to me that approximately 275 classroom-contact hours should prepare the candidates adequately for the exam.

Second, the results of the test should be recorded on the students' transcripts. This was done very successfully at the University of Alabama.[5]

Third, students should not be charged the $10.00 fee since this seems an actual or potential deterrent to taking the test. It would not be asking too much from the Federal Republic of Germany to fully or partially subsidize the cost of this test.

Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, the Goethe House in New York and the Goethe Institutes in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Houston, and San Francisco should appoint more 'Prüfungsbeauftragte' who are authorized to administer the written and oral parts of the test. On the basis of the information I received, this is already done at UCLA and Berkeley. Since more and more institutions are offering the exam, the test administrators from the German Cultural Centers are very much in demand, especially during the months of March and April. More people, trained in the administration of the test, are needed so that all participating institutions can schedule the exam at a time convenient for them. The test results could be submitted to the regional centers which then would fill out and mail the diploma to students.

V. Conclusion

Most of the institutions polled agree that the certificate exam is useful. Students are provided the opportunity to compare their proficiency in German on a worldwide basis and they obtain a document which is recognized on campus and beyond, and which may well prove useful in future professional or academic pursuits. The test's usefulness was again proven this summer when one of the participants in the Middlebury Summer Program, who had been awarded a stipend from the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung, received a notice from the foundation containing the following information:

> Da Sie Ihre Deutschsprachstudien mit einem Goethe-Institut-Zertifikat abgeschlossen haben, ist die Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung ausnahmsweise bereit, die Kosten des Kurses am Middlebury College in Höhne eines Sprachkursus an einem Goethe-Institut in Deutschland zu erstatten. Dieser beläuft sich auf 2,680,--DM.

The Zertifikat Deutsch examination also serves as a more accurate measure of the students' abilities than course grades so that students are provided with a more realistic assessment of their own performance level; as Anni Whissen put it, "the certificate measures students' ability very accurately, and for those who pass it, it serves as a nice recognition." The test also has an impact on the curriculum. Ronald Dunbar considers the test "a marvelous component to the German program," and to John Grandin the test is useful

> because it has helped us to measure the effectiveness of our programs and provided a clearer standard toward which we may work. I believe that it has already influenced us to revise and give our courses a greater balance in terms of attention to all four skills. To be specific, we were devoting too much attention to reading in the third and fourth semesters . . .

Institutions offering the exam use, in addition to literary texts, non-literary materials which may provide important information to students going abroad or preparing for a professional career.

The examination for the Zertifikat Deutsch als Fremdsprache can also be an important morale booster for faculty and students. Wolfgang Mieder

from the University of Vermont remarks that "students very much enjoyed taking this test . . . it was a fine experience for them and the colleagues," and David Scrase from the same institution supports this statement:

> In fact, we, faculty and students, all felt that giving the test was an excellent thing to have done. We shall continue to administer the Zertifikat Deutsch als Fremdsprache with the greatest of pleasure.

Gerd K. Schneider
Syracuse University

Secretary and Acting Chairman of
the MLA Executive Committee
for the Division
on the Teaching of Language

[1] eds. Deutscher Volkhochschul-Verband e.v. Bonn-Bad Godesberg und Goethe-Institut zur Pflege der deutschen Sprache im Ausland und zur Förderung der internationalen kulturellen Zusammenarbeit e.V. München (1977), pp. 10-11.

[2] Ibid., p. 21.

[3] Ibid., p. 30.

[4] Institutions offering the examination for the Zertifikat Deutsch als Fremdsprache are:

University of Akron
University of Alabama at Huntsville
University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa
Albuquerque Academy
University of Arkansas
Berea College
Brigham Young University
Brown University
Bucks County Community College
University of California at Berkeley
University of California at Los Angeles
California State University at Fullerton
California State University at Long Beach
Center College at Danville (KY)
Central College
Chatham College
University of Cincinnati
Colgate University
Columbia University
Cook College
University of Delaware
Douglass College
Eastern College
Eastern Kentucky University
Eastern Michigan University
Emory University
University of Florida at Gainesville

Schneider	Notes
Florida State University	Middle Tennessee State University
Furman University	University of Minnesota
Georgia Institute of Technology	University of Mississippi
Georgia Southern College	Montclair State College
Georgia State University	Morehouse College
Georgetown College	Murray State University
Hiram College	Nazareth College
Indiana University at Bloomington	University of Nebraska at Lincoln
University of Iowa	University of New Mexico
Juniata College	New Mexico State University
Kent State University - Stark Campus	SUNY at Binghamton
University of Kentucky	SUNY College at Brockport
Kenyon College	SUNY at Cortland
LeMoyne College	SUNY at Oswego
University of Louisville	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Louisville Collegiate School	University of North Carolina at Charlotte
Miami University at Oxford	North Kentucky University
Michigan Technical University	Ohio Northern University
	Pennsylvania State University
	University of Pittsburgh, Johnstown Campus
	Queens College

University of Rhode Island
Rutgers University

University of the South
University of South Carolina at Columbia
St. Joseph's University
Swarthmore College
Syracuse University

Temple University
University of Tennessee at Knoxville
University of Texas at El Paso
Thomas Moore College

Trenton State College
Tufts University

Vanderbilt University
University of Vermont
Villanova University

Wells College
West Virginia University
Western Kentucky University
Wright State University

Xavier University

Deutsche Sommerschule am Atlantik

Deutsche Sommerschule, Middlebury College

Deutsche Sommerschule, Taos

Deutsches Haus, NYU

[5] See Oliver Finley Grave's article on "The Zertifikat Deutsch als Fremdsprache," in Unterrichtspraxis, ii (1980), 211-216.